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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN FM LAVROV IN POLAND: A SOFT TOUCH, EXCEPT
FOR GEORGIA AND IRAN

Classified By: DCM Kenneth Hillas, reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Russian FM Sergei Lavrov met October 5 with President Lech Kaczynski, PM Jarek Kaczynski and FM Anna Fotyga during a one-day visit to Warsaw. According to senior officials from the MFA and presidential chancellery, the overall tone of the visit was positive, although little was achieved on substantive issues. However, the meeting met the overall GOP goal of re-establishing a dialogue with the Russian government and laying the ground work for improving bilateral relations, which are currently under severe strain.

Lavrov was largely non-confrontational on bilateral issues, including the prospect of Polish participation in the U.S. Missile Defense program. However, he maintained a hard line on the current crisis in Russian-Georgian relations and continued Russian opposition to UN sanctions on Iran. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Media reports focused on the Lavrov visit as an important step in improving bilateral atmospherics, while acknowledging there had been little expectation of any immediate breakthroughs on specific issues of contention. Agreement was reportedly reached on a plan for Polish-Russian bilateral consultations over the next year, including discussion of UN, OSCE and EU-Russia dialogue issues. Lavrov stated publicly that Presidents Kaczynski and Putin were looking forward to a summit meeting sometime in 2007. When queried by the press about possible U.S. Missile Defense deployments in Poland, Lavrov made no negative comments but merely expressed the hope that U.S.-Polish talks would be "transparent." Lavrov took the party hard line on Georgia, telling the media that Russian-Georgian relations could only improve "if Georgia gave up its anti-Russian policy." He also threw cold water on questions about Iran sanctions, stressing that such an approach would be "radical" and the UN should first "do everything to use other resources."

President Lech Kaczynski

¶3. (C) Presidential foreign policy adviser Amb. Andrzej Krawczyk told DCM that Lavrov's meeting with Lech Kaczynski was dominated by energy security, the crisis in Georgia and the continuing Russian ban on Polish meat exports. Krawczyk said that the energy discussion revolved around the Baltic pipeline. Kaczynski reiterated Polish objections to the Russian-German project's detour around Poland, and Lavrov said the pipeline would go forward because the Russians considered it the best approach. However, rather than seeking to overcome Polish opposition, Lavrov offered assurances that the pipeline was not directed against Poland

and in the end concluded that "you have your view and we have ours." The impasse over Russian oil deliveries to the Mazeiku refinery in Lithuania was not discussed.

14. (C) Not surprisingly, Lavrov was at his most animated on the subject of Georgia, calling President Mikheil Saakashvili anti-Russian. He accused Saakashvili of creating a dictatorship and asserted that there was no respect for human rights in Georgia, alleging that there was regular use of torture in Georgian prisons. Lavrov also asserted that Saakashvili saw the U.S. and NATO as providing a protective umbrella from behind which he could pursue adventurous goals.

Kaczynski replied that it seemed Saakashvili was making a legitimate attempt to restore Georgian sovereignty, in response to which Lavrov reverted to his standard formula: "You have your view and we have ours."

15. (C) On other bilateral issues, Lavrov promised to give a new impulse to efforts to remove the ban on importation of Polish meats. He also told Kaczynski that President Putin would indeed like to hold a summit meeting in 2007, though he did not propose either specific dates or a venue.

16. (C) Lavrov apparently did not try to dissuade Kaczynski from cooperating with the U.S. on Missile Defense. Instead, he indicated simply that Moscow wanted to understand Polish plans and to have assurances that if the GOP moved forward on MD it would do so in a transparent and predictable way. Kaczynski responded that discussions with the US were still in a preliminary stage and no decisions had been taken. Krawczyk said that Lavrov's lack of hostility on this issue surprised the Polish side, and they were still assessing whether there had actually been a real change in Russian policy toward Poland. (COMMENT. Lavrov's public and private comments on MD lost some of their value after Russian DefMin

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Ivanov's sharp public criticism of MD on October 10, which was widely covered in Poland. END COMMENT.)

PM Jaroslaw Kaczynski

17. (C) According to MFA U/S Witold Waszczykowski, Lavrov covered much the same ground with PM Kaczynski as he had with the president, though with some additions and new twists. When the PM queried him on Russian-Georgian relations, Lavrov engaged in a long historical discourse about the early bid by the Caucasus nations to join the Soviet Union and the many political and economic benefits it brought them, surprising even the Poles with his Soviet-style explanation. In contrast to his meeting with President Kaczynski, Lavrov was more direct with PM Kaczynski about Russian opposition to MD, but he was not heavy handed and he repeated Moscow's desire for transparency and predictability.

18. (C) Lavrov was very critical of the U.S. policy on Iran, asserting that current US sanctions were out of line with P-6 principles. He also criticized U.S. policy in Iraq and Afghanistan, arguing that efforts to build democracy were moving too fast, failing to respect the interests of neighboring states, and putting too much emphasis on military force and not enough on the political process.

19. (C) On issues closer to home, Lavrov reportedly raised a technical issue about two border crossing points on Poland's border with Kaliningrad. In reply, Kaczynski noted Russia's refusal to grant maritime access to Polish shipping to the Vistula Bay, which is shared with Kaliningrad and accessible only via the Strait of Baltiysk in Russian territorial waters. According to Waszczykowski, the PM made clear that if the Russian closure - which Warsaw views as political - is not lifted, Poland will go forward with construction of a canal across the Vistula peninsula to provide direct access to the Gulf of Gdansk. Lavrov responded that Russia was open either to negotiating a new Protocol on Polish access to the

Gulf or to amending the current one.

FM Anny Fotyga

¶10. (C) Waszczykowski told DCM that Lavrov had told FM Anna Fotyga that Moscow was considering a ban on Polish milk exports to Russia because of "health and safety concerns." Along with the current ban on meat imports (see paragraph 5 above) the Poles took this as a explicit reminder that Moscow was still prepared to use the trade stick to pressure Poland in other unrelated policy areas.

¶11. (C) During a discussion about "what to do with Lukashenko," in which Fotyga complained about the treatment of the Polish minority in Belarus, Lavrov drew a parallel to Latvia's treatment of its Russian minority. Lavrov reportedly then made a pitch for "Slavic solidarity" in dealing with the Germans, making reference to "the Polish minority in Eastern Germany." Fotyga pointed out that there was no such minority, but it then became clear that Lavrov had in mind the Sorbs (a historical Slavic minority in Saxony and Brandenburg not directly related to the Poles). Waszczykowski said this line of reasoning (like the line about the Caucasus states having wanted to join the Soviet Union) really took Fotyga and the others aback. The Poles left the meeting perplexed.

Positive Tone - A "Favor" from Lavrov

¶12. (C) Presidential advisor Krawczyk told DCM that, overall, Lavrov's meetings were positive in tone and that the Poles believed his visit had improved the atmospherics, though without resolving any outstanding problems. In addition to plans for a Putin-Kaczynski summit, a bilateral commission of experts was to be created to deal with cultural relations and historical issues (including the Katyn massacres). However, this was all left vague, with the details to be worked out later. Krawczyk acknowledged that Lavrov's visit had shown Russia engaging Poland in a constructive way, perhaps to impress West Europeans. U/S Waszczykowski too expressed pleasant surprise at Lavrov's positive approach and apparent willingness to improve bilateral relations.

¶13. (C) Comment: There has been some speculation at very senior levels of the MFA that Lavrov viewed the weakened

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Kaczynski government as needing a foreign policy success, and therefore came to Warsaw to test the waters. Poland's political leadership is for the most part inexperienced with foreign policy and has little practice dealing with the Russians, but even the experienced diplomats Krawczyk and Waszczykowski seemed almost entranced by Lavrov's good behavior and relatively mild treatment of substantive problems. Whether or not the Russian expression of interest and good will is genuine, the Kaczynskis and their advisers seem desperate for a foreign policy success and are therefore likely to pursue this opening as far as it leads. END COMMENT.
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